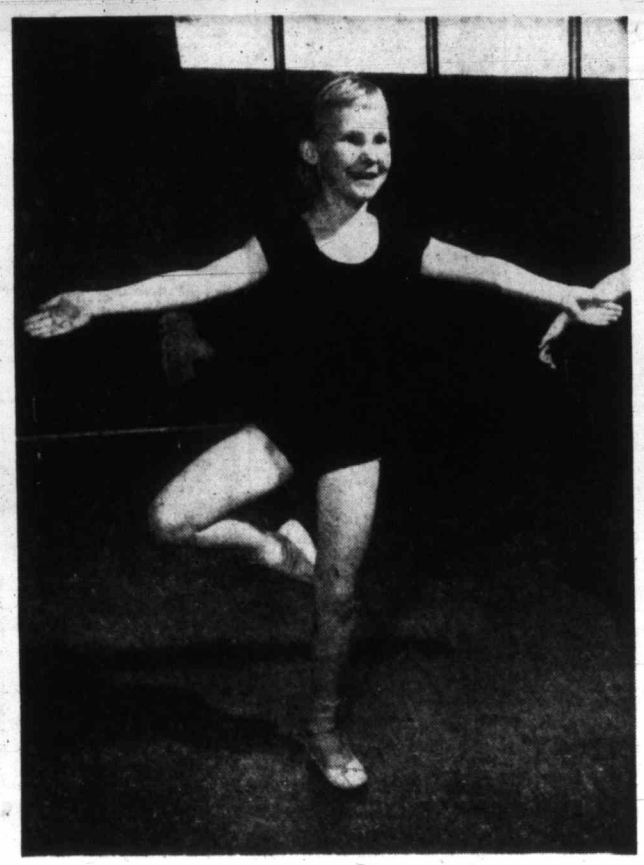
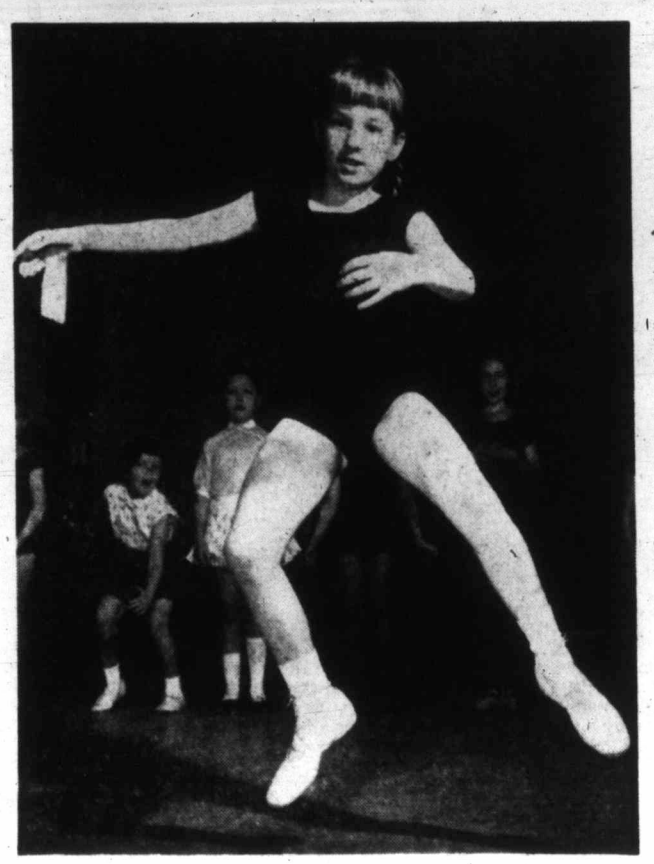
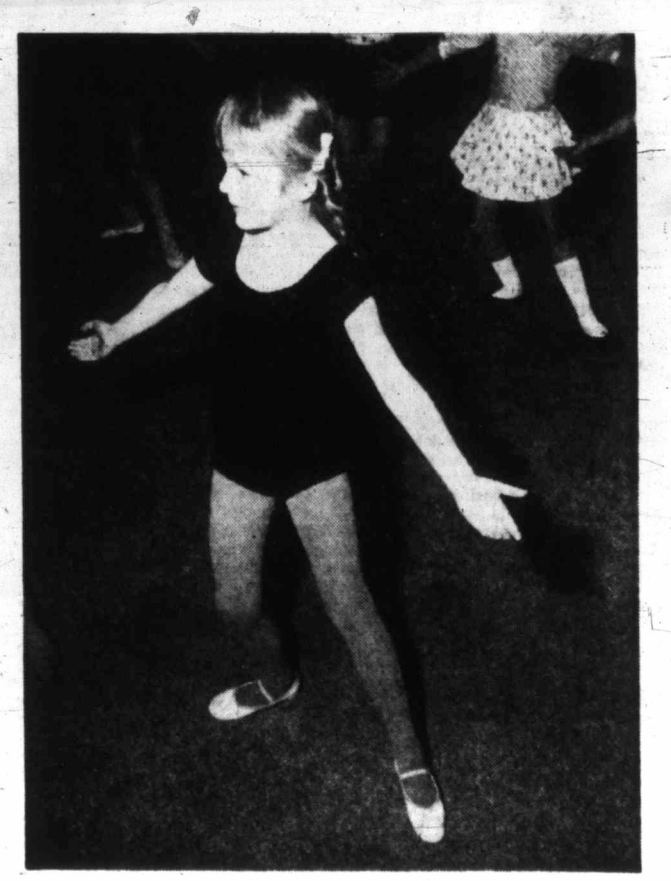


Obeying the command "Retirez," blonde and petite Beverly Alquire, 2261 Estevan, maintains perfect balance and manages a big smile for photographer Jim Ryan. Her simple black knitted leotard is typical of the children's practice dress.

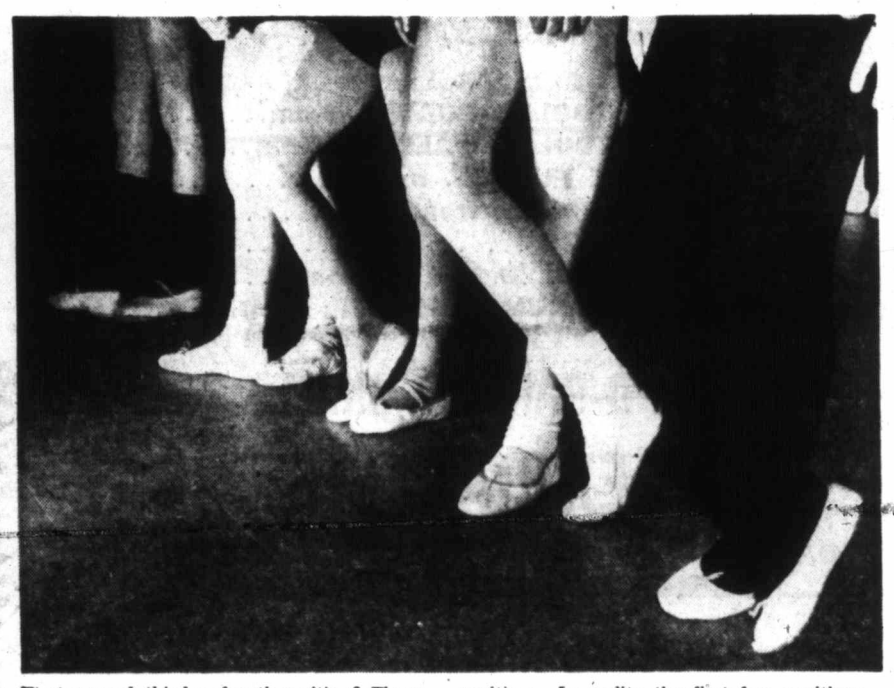


Light-as-a-feather, pigtailed Kerry Van Aggelan executes a "pas de chat," one of the pupils' favorite exercises. The "step of the cat" consists of a long gliding step and then a nimble leap into space. Notice her classmate in the background ready to spring into action.



Intently watching her instructor is little Pamela McDonald, 1649 Richardson Street, as the class performs a balance exercise.

Each a Prima Ballerina In Her Dreams



First, second, third or fourth position? These five pairs of legs deliberately tangle to show the difficulty of learning even the basic ballet positions. In reality the first four positions must be mastered thoroughly before any advance is made.

★ ★ ★

They're Dainty But They Work

★ ★ ★

The years of intensive training behind the floodlight stage would stagger the average imagination.

But the dainty pre-prima ballerinas here seem willing to work strenuously and long to fulfill the dream of becoming the first lady of the dance —a dream that many little girls envision and few realize.

How many of us, thinking back, can remember wanting a chance to learn to dance, to burn up some of our youthful energy in this art which ranks as one of the world's most beautiful?

Canada is a relative baby in the realm of ballet but she can point with pride to her famous Royal Ballet Company and the countless smaller groups over the nation which are trying to further the art.

One such small group has its headquarters in a small white stucco building alongside the Oak Bay firehall.

On Saturday mornings you would hear the staccato tapping of black-slippered toes as a softly, resonant voice commands "Retirez!" to the melodious strains of a tape-recorded Strauss waltz or an excerpt from Les Sylphides.

More than 50 interested, eager pupils attend Louise Laeser's school of ballet in the Oak Bay Guide Hall—not all at once, but in classes of eight to 10.

Mrs. Laeser, a diminutive five-foot-plus-one, has definite ideas on the teaching of ballet.

She is in a position to make her own rules, for she has eight years' professional work behind her with the Winnipeg Ballet Company and a whole lifetime of just plain love of ballet.

Her ideas are simple. In her pupils she tries to develop posture as well as teach them intricate dance techniques.

"So many youngsters may become muscle-bound through improper use of certain muscles as they learn," she twinkled, and added, "I know from practical experience."

Her club is a new one, four years old and still in its formative stages. She doesn't perform annual reviews but hopes in the near future to present a ballet made up of the more advanced members.

Before taking up space at the Guide Hall, Mrs. Laeser used the living room of her Foul Bay Road home to teach her pupils.

Another of her ideas is that the bars normally used in ballet work are not so necessary in the beginning. She's attempting to teach her young pupils balance, for "they won't have the bar to lean on in the middle of a performance of Swan Lake."

However bars and mirrors in the hall would be a help in teaching.

In her "spare" time, Mrs. Laeser is busy rearing four children, from 10 months to six years with a pair of four-year-old twins in between.

Louise Laesar's pupils are at an advantage (or disadvantage as the case may be) without the standard training bar. Here they learn balance and posture, an important part of the school's curriculum. Classes are held in the Scout Hall behind the Oak Bay firehall.

Dimpled Dawne Gillespie prepares for her ballet lesson by checking an important piece of equipment, her soft, black leather slippers. Dawne was wearing bright red leotards under her black top and presented a pretty picture.

Arranged by Ann Smellie.

Colonist Photos by Jim Ryan.